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The POWER *of* GOD *over the* CONSTITUTION *of* NATURE.

A

SERMON

PREACHED ON

The GENERAL FAST,

February 6, 1756.

WITH A

DEDICATION

TO

The younger Part of the TOWN.

Diſcite, O miſeri! & rerum cognoſcite cauſas:
Quid ſumus, & quidnam victuri gignimur; ordo
Quis datus.——Quem te Deus eſſe
Juſſit, & humanâ quâ parte locatus es in re.

PERSIUS, Sat. 3.

LONDON:

Printed for M. COOPER, at the *Globe* in *Pater-noſter-row*. MDCCLVI.

The Power of GOD over the Constitution of Nature.

A

SERMON

The GENERAL FAST,

To the Younger Part of the TOWN.

GENTLEMEN,

A Very ſenſible Man, whoſe Name moſt of you I dare ſay have met with, for it is mentioned in many Romances, uſed to thank God principally for three Things: That he was a Man, an *Athenian*, and a Philoſopher. What Expreſſions of Gratitude aſcend to Heaven from any of you for Obligations equal or analogous to theſe, I do believe all your Acquaintance, of the leaſt Penetration, need not be informed. I will, if you pleaſe, offer you my Opinion of the Reaſon of *Plato*'s Thankfulneſs on theſe Occaſions.

As a *Man*, he was poſſeſſed of Reaſon; as an *Athenian*, he had excellent Opportunities of acquiring Learning and Knowledge; and as a *Philoſopher*, he underſtood and reverenced Religion: That very Religion of Nature, ſo much admired in the

Profeſſions of many Men of Faſhion, who chooſe to practiſe no Religion at all.

You muſt know he was a mighty Dealer in Subtilties, and myſtical Meanings. —And therefore I ſuſpect him of a very ſevere Sarcaſm in his Thankfulneſs for being a Man. Many Creatures moved upright, diſcerned and practiſed the general Diſtinctions of Life, of whom he nevertheleſs means an Excluſion in his Idea of Man.

In that celebrated Seat of Science and Politeneſs, he obſerved many human Figures truly proportioned, and accurately adorned—for, Gentlemen, you are not the firſt Set in the World dependent on Decoration for a *ſummum bonum*: *Athens* had Thouſands of well-dreſſed Creatures: But *Plato* admits not one of them into his Definition of Man, implied in the Beginning of his conciſe emphatical Form of Thankſgiving: Becauſe he could find in every Tribe of Animals Numbers that equalled them at leaſt, in all Operations not vicious and unnatural. For, on the Nature of Man he founds the Dignity of him, and thence derives his Acknowledgements to the Author of ſo eminent a Character—

A Being conducted by Reaſon, Reflection, and moral Diſcernment, through the various Engagements and Connections of Life; through the ſeveral Offices of its Condition, and Duties of its Order in the univerſal Syſtem.

Such a Being, Gentlemen, is a Man. Think for once—think candidly. Do not ye commend him for thanking God that he was ſuch a Being? Let us, if you will, ſift his Sarcaſm a little farther—perhaps you will obſerve a pretty ſtriking Contraſt. Had he given an explicit Deſcription of thoſe Creatures that wear the Reſemblance, and yet ſupport no Part of the Character of Man, I think he muſt have left us ſomething to this Effect. They claim the ſame Original and Deſtination—have the ſame natural Endowments and Qualifications; are fitted and intended to rank with Men. Obſerve how they forfeit this Honor and Privilege. They roundly renounce the Direction of Reaſon, baniſh Reflection, and ſuppreſs all Incitements to moral Deliberation: They deſert all the Paths of Virtue and Diſcretion, ſcorn the fair Fields of Sobriety and Innocence—launch without Star or Compaſs

paſs into the dangerous Ocean of Voluptuouſneſs; and drive without Helm or Pilot amidſt the deſtructive Rocks of Vice and Folly.

Are not ye ſtartled, Gentlemen? Do ye ſee nothing in this Deſcription, that rouſes your Recollection? Do you know no Creatures under theſe Predicaments? The Metaphor is too hard for ye—ſtrip him and let him tell ye the naked Truth. —They live with as little Appearance of Thinking as any Inſect that crawls, with as little Attention to moral Obligations as any Beaſt that preys—They wound their Faculties by a thouſand Modes of Affectation, and bury their Conſciences in Brothels.

If ye have in all your Acquaintance a Man of one ſingle Grain of Senſe and Candor, aſk him if he cannot ſhew ye Numbers of this Stamp. It will not interfere with Good-breeding—not at all diſtreſs your Politeneſs—the Search will give your Friend very little Trouble—and *Plato* will ſoon be juſtified for thanking God that he was a Man.

Very well. But why ſo thankful for being an *Athenian?* Other Parts of *Greece*

were

were equally pleaſant—and there were other Conſtitutions equally eaſy—why this Diſtinction therefore? I will tell ye Gentlemen: And I will neither wonder that the Streſs of your Queſtions lies on Eaſe and Pleaſure, nor that the true Anſwer does not occur to you.

There *were* other Conſtitutions equally good and eaſy—There is a Conſtitution now in the World vaſtly ſuperior to any that ever exiſted before it, and more productive of real Happineſs and Comfort: Its greateſt Imperfection is an exceſſive Mildneſs in laying no proper Reſtraints on the Profligacy of Savages of Faſhion, and no effectual Diſcouragements on the Libertiniſm of Wretches of Diſtinction. But this is beſide his preſent Purpoſe.

His Thankfulneſs in this Particular aroſe from the floriſhing Condition of Learning—the improved State of the moſt valuable Arts of Life—the great Advancement of moral Studies—and the Perfection of Decency, the only genuine Politeneſs. All theſe his great Maſter had planted, and he found them thriving in the Schools and Colleges of that celebrated City: Where virtuous Curioſity

had perpetual Opportunities of Satisfaction, and where Ignorance was infamous.

Look round ye, Gentlemen. Do ye know no Country where Learning and Science floriſh? Where all the uſeful Arts relative to Man as a rational moral Creature are thoroughly underſtood? Out of mere Politeneſs (from Reflection I expect nothing from ye) you will certainly anſwer, "We do."

Pray then compare your Opportunities with your Attainments. You inhabit a Country which challenges the World for the Cultivation and Improvement of ſound Learning and true Philoſophy. We pretend to more.—We affirm that Schools are open, where ye may learn the only real Wiſdom—we mean revealed Religion. It is taught with good Senſe, and ſupported by good Argument too; Froth, Impertinence, and Prevarication, we leave to the Preachers of that Country that furniſhes your Embroidery and Tinſel. Theſe Schools are open. Do ye frequent them? Come, come, I will not puzzle ye, I mean the Churches. Do ye not waſte thoſe Hours in Folly and ridiculous Idleneſs, that reaſonable People allow to ſe-

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rious Purpoſes? And what do ye waſte beſides? Time—ye can never recall. Conſcience—ye can never extinguiſh. And Character—ye know not how to value. This is not all: Ye are not contented here: Your Freedoms with religious Subjects are amazingly unbecoming. An Index, or a Title Page, or a profligate Companion, has lent ye the Names and Scraps of looſe Immoral Writers. With theſe wretched Materials ye ſet up in the Profeſſion of Infidelity—prettily ſneer at the Bible, and ſhew a ſovereign Contempt for every Believer in the World.

In this Career of Emptineſs and Impertinence, you are ſtopp'd and examined. What is the Conſequence? Not the leaſt Knowledge of the Subject, not one Mark of Reading or Reflection, not the fainteſt Traces of Erudition or Argument are diſcovered in you. This is really ſhameful. Let any Foreigner upon Earth, with a plain honeſt Underſtanding, totally neutral in this Queſtion, a Hottentot if you will, be deſired to determine. Tell him you induſtriouſly treat with Scorn and Contumely a Subject held in higheſt Veneration by the ſobereſt, diſcreeteſt Part of

your Countrymen—the Evidences of the Truth of it you have never examined—the Nature of its Proofs you never once conſidered.—Tell him there are in *England* the beſt Opportunities in the World of underſtanding the Merits of this Cauſe, all which you deliberately neglect, and remain in utter Ignorance; Then deſire his Opinion of you. Indignation would confound him—Amazement would ſtrike him dumb. There is no Aggravation in this State of your Caſe; I fear when it is ultimately adjudged, it will terribly inflame your Guilt that ye were *Engliſhmen*.

Why our *Athenian* was ſo thankful for being a Philoſopher, ye have not, I ſuppoſe, the leaſt Conception. It would be unreaſonable to think otherwiſe; it would be to as little Purpoſe to expect it from you.

——————*ut ſi quis Aſellum*
In campo doceat parentem currere frænis.

Your preſent Frame of Mind can admit no ſuch Sentiment. On your firſt Return to Humanity ye would immediately perceive the Propriety of this Part of his Thankſgiving.

True Philoſophy is for ever accompanied with Modeſty and Humility of Mind, with Sobriety of Judgment, and a decent Diffidence of its own Penetration. It therefore meets in all its Reſearches perpetual Occaſions of cheriſhing and improving theſe Qualities, and continual Materials of genuine Pleaſure and rational Adoration. Not ſuch a Pleaſure as thoſe Men feel, whom one of the beſt Writers and Reaſoners in the World, with a moſt juſt Contempt has called, "little Philoſophers." Men, who, with much Aſſurance and Self-ſufficiency have floated on the Surface of Learning and Philoſophy, through the Delirium of a conceited Imagination have dreamed they fathomed all its Depths, and with a very impious Uſurpation have preſcribed in Matters they did not underſtand.

There is an eaſy certain Prevention or Cure of this Diſtemper,

——ſunt certa piacula quæ te,
Ter purè lecto poterunt recreare Libello.

Compoſe your Paſſions—diſcharge your Prejudices—and burn your Novels; then read, with Candor and Attention, three

Volumes of Diſcourſes formerly delivered at the *Temple* Church: You will unavoidably receive Conviction and Delight—*jucunda et idonea Vitæ*—will very ſoon be better and happier Creatures. If ye love Perſpicuity and Dignity of Language, ſound concluſive Argumentation, and Demonſtration of Truths of infinite Importance, ſteal from your Circle of poor, ſhadowy, ſilly Pleaſures Time enough to give theſe Volumes a ſerious honeſt Peruſal. Ye will then be thankful for underſtanding a more exalted Philoſophy than *Plato* ever thought of.

Many of you, it is thought, are likely to be called to the Defence of your Country: The Religion of it is its greateſt Bleſſing—and will conſtitute the trueſt Merit of your Vigour againſt its Enemies. Wear it in your Hearts in all your Expeditions—your Laurels will then be ever green and glorious. A Soldier of the firſt Diſtinction in the Annals of the World ſhall be exemplary to you,

——— *media inter prælia ſemper*
Stellarum cælique viis, ſuperiſque vacavi.

Julius

Julius Cæſar amidſt the weighty Cares of his Command, the Toils of War, and the very Confuſion of Battle, found Leiſure to expreſs his Duty to the Gods. Go—and do likewiſe: Return with Victory and Virtue—and be honoured for the Conqueſt of your Vices, and the baſe malicious Enemies of your Country.

My chief Inducement to this Publication is a Conviction of the miſchievous Effects of your Examples. Ye are diffuſing the Poiſon of your Immoralities in your preſent Stage of Life, and ye are laying a certain Foundation of a barren, uſeleſs, contemptible, wicked, and therefore comfortleſs old Age.

I know very well there is nothing new or ſtriking in this Compoſition to Men of any Degree of Reading and Thinking; and for that very Reaſon I addreſs it to you. It pretends no Diſcovery in philoſophical, nor any Depth in theological Knowledge: There is not, however, either in the Diſcourſe, or in the Heart of its Author, any of the Preciſeneſs of Fanaticiſm, or the offenſive Cant of Enthuſiaſm. He very ſincerely wiſhes an univerſal Reformation; a catholic Practice of our moſt holy Religion;

gion; and an unreserved Acknowledgement and Reverence of the Power of God. In this Case, ye would be intitled to infinitely more honourable Additions than *Plato* could ever aspire to; ye would possess the sublimest Attributes of Humanity; for ye might, if ye pleased, become in the sincerest, most exalted Senses of the Words, *Englishmen*, Gentlemen, and *Christians*.

I am,

Your very humble Servant,

ISAIAH, Chap. xlviii. Ver. 13.

Mine Hand alſo hath laid the Foundation of the Earth: And my Right-hand hath ſpanned the Heavens: When I call unto them, they ſtand up together.

THE very beſt Faculties of the moſt ingenious Mind cannot poſſibly conceive a more awful Image of almighty Power than theſe Words of the Prophet repreſent to us. Conſider the Earth we inhabit, the Productions of it that ſupport us, the glorious Scenes of Pleaſure with which it entertains us, the liberal Profuſion of Accommodations it pours forth for us, and the amazing Wiſdom and Contrivance evident in every Part of * it—Raiſe your Obſervation

* Tum multitudinem pecorum, partim ad veſcendum, partim ad cultus agrorum, partim ad vehendum, partim

tion to the Heavens above us; look on that aſtoniſhing Multitude of ſtupendous Lights, which roll in moſt magnificent Order to ſerve and comfort us; comtemplate the immenſe Expanſe; the boundleſs Firmament; recollect the Times and Seaſons, the Days and Years dependent on the Operations of the heavenly Bodies: Honeſtly reflect on theſe affecting Objects, and then aſk your Hearts what that Being muſt be who formed the Earth out of nothing—who ſpread out the Heavens —who ſpake, and they were made; commanded, and they were created; who calls unto them, and *they ſtand up together*.

Theſe Speculations may be thought at firſt View appropriated to the Learned, to Men of Leiſure and profound Contemplation; and to be above the Reach of common Capacities, and illiterate Underſtandings. But conſider how many Ages were left to this ſingle univerſal Method of Inſtruction, without any other Notices than a few imperfect and ſtrangely corrupted Traditions:

partim ad corpora veſtienda: Hominemque ipſum quaſi contemplatorem Cœli ac Deorum, ipſorumque cultorem: Atque HOMINIS utilitati agros omnes et maria parentia. CICER. Tuſc. Diſp. Lib. I.

Traditions: It will then be impoſſible to ſuppoſe that there are not in the Works of God ſufficient Evidences of his Being and Wiſdom, and proper Incitements to various Duties, agreeable to the natural Faculties of the human Mind, and obvious to any common attentive Capacity. If God never left himſelf without Witneſs, the Works of Creation muſt be admitted as the only Atteſtations of his Power and Godhead to many Generations. Other Opportunities of diſcovering them they had not: Revelations of any kind they were not favored with; neither had the Heathen Knowledge of his Law. All the Religion therefore, all the Virtue they could attain to, muſt be derived from thoſe Demonſtrations of the Attributes and Perfections of the Deity plainly inſcribed on all the Parts of Nature. Theſe Impreſſions were to be univerſal, becauſe they were to lead all Men to the Knowledge of the Truth. They were not calculated for the wiſe and learned only—the Pride of Learning, and the Preſumption of Philoſophy, often darkened their Minds ſo totally, that they ſaw none of thoſe noble Proofs, that were always diſ-

coverable by the naked Eye of modeſt Simplicity and unaffected Inquiry.

The Proofs of ſeveral grand Points of Religion and Piety, offered to our Senſes in the Fabrick and Conſtitution of Nature, may be conſidered as the Teſtimony of God himſelf, and afford a very ſure and profitable Inſtruction. To this Teſtimony God required an univerſal Attention; or elſe he was regardleſs of the Morality of the general Part of his rational Creatures; which is impoſſible to be imagined. If therefore he expected Improvement in religious Sentiments, and Advancement in Duty, from Evidences of his own Perfections, and of our Dependence on him, legible in the Frame of Nature; the Diſcovery of theſe Evidences cannot be attended with any Difficulties inſurmountable by the general Capacities of his Creatures, for whoſe Inſtruction they were intended.

There *are* no Difficulties in the Diſcovery of theſe Proofs: Every honeſt Mind will diſcern in all the Objects that ſurround us amazing Demonſtrations of Wiſdom and Contrivance, and very affecting Monuments of a moſt diffuſive Liberality. Contemplate

Contemplate any Part of Nature, any Production of the Earth, or any of the Ornaments of the Heavens: Conſider their Structure and their Uſes, how perfectly they are adapted to all the Purpoſes appointed for them, how faithfully they anſwer all the Ends our own † Experience teaches us to expect from them: How conſiſtently with their ſeveral Connections and Relations to other Parts of the Syſtem they conſtantly perſevere: And how invariably they promote our Happineſs and Comfort. Then look out for an adequate Cauſe of all theſe Things. How came they here? What conſtructed and eſtabliſhed them? What taught the Earth to bring forth an inexpreſſible Variety of Fruits? What inſtructed the Moon in her certain Seaſons, or whence knows the Sun his going down?

To themſelves it is impoſſible to aſcribe the Offices they perform; There are no Arguments of Deſign or Intention in any of them; Underſtanding they have none: No

† Non inter mittit ſuo tempore,
Cælum niteſcere, arbores frondeſcere,
Vites lætiſcere, pampinis pubeſcere;
Ramt baccarum ubertate incurveſcere,
Segetes largiri fruges, florere omnia,
Fontes ſcatere, herbis prata conveſtirier.

Cic.

No Part of Matter is at all intelligent. It cannot therefore be the Author of its own Exiſtence, nor of any methodical determinate Proceedings.

Will Chance or Accident account for theſe Things, or furniſh an Explanation of the ſeveral Appearances of natural Objects? To the Diſgrace of the human Heart and Underſtanding it hath ſometimes been pretended, directly contrary to the ſincere Dictates of the one, and the abſolute Conviction of the other. Vice introduced a Notion of it, and Arrogance and flagitious Folly endeavoured to ſupport it. Men who choſe to continue in diſſolute profligate Courſes wanted a Shelter from the Storms of Conſcience, an Expedient to diſarm it of its Sting. Reflection on their own Practices was tormenting to them on the Suppoſition that an infinite Being created and governed this World, took Cognizance of the Actions of Men, and would ſome time or other puniſh their Wickedneſs. They therefore bore down and ſuppreſſed theſe natural Sentiments, that they might not interrupt them, and occaſionally perſuaded themſelves that the Formation of the ſeveral Parts of Nature, and the Events ariſing

ſing from them, were accidental. This wants no Confutation—every Man's Senſes muſt fill him with Contempt and Abhorrence of ſuch Opinions—and the Mechaniſm of the ſimpleſt Object in the Univerſe will riſe up in the Judgment, and condemn the Maintainers of them.

There is no where to be found ſuch a Variety of enormous Abſurdities and ſtrange Contradictions, as in the Accounts of the Production and Adminiſtration of the World which we meet with in the chimerical Rambles of antient Sophiſtry, and the profane Syſtems of modern Infidelity. Their Writings abound with Imaginations ridiculous and extravagant—with Impropriеties evident and offenſive to any common Underſtanding. This will immediately receive its Proof from an Inſpection of their Arguments.

And how ſhould it be otherwiſe? They are, as St. *Paul* ſays, *without God in the World*—leave him out of the Account—diſcharge him from all Share and Concern in the Generation and Management of material Natures, and exclude his Agency from all Direction in the Conſtitution of the Univerſe. After this, the Cauſes they aſſign of the ſeveral Effects viſi-

viſible in the World are manifeſtly inadequate, and the Conſequences deduced from ſuch Principles are monſtrous and impoſſible.

The Powers of a plaſtic Nature, the Efficiency of natural Cauſes, and the invariable Operation of Neceſſity or Fate, have all been founded very high in the Philoſophy of ſome or other of theſe Men, and have equally deformed the Speculations of their ſeveral Patrons with Impiety and Nonſenſe. This is the natural Conſequence of leaving the plain eaſy Path of Senſe and Reaſon, through a wretched Affectation of traverſing the dark Wilds of Suppoſition and Refinement.

But, the Believer's Syſtem of Philoſophy is infallible and unexceptionable; conſiſtent in all its Parts, awful and venerable in all its Views—comfortable and uſeful in all its Repreſentations. His Senſes tell him that the Works of Creation are Demonſtrations of the Wiſdom, Power, and Goodneſs of their Author: And his Bible tells him that the Hand of an infinite God hath laid the Foundation of the Earth, and that his Right-hand hath ſpanned the Heavens. There is no Difficulty in the Comprehenſion of this;

ſince

ſince a Cauſe is produced equal to all Occurrences, and becauſe all Things are poſſible with God:—There can be no Deluſion in it—becauſe it is ſupported and proved by the expreſs Evidences of our own Faculties, and the poſitive Declarations of God. *Lift up your Eyes on high, and behold who hath created theſe Things, that bringeth out their Hoſt by Number—for, that he is ſtrong in Power not one faileth,* Iſa. xl. 26. The Prophet alledges here, that you cannot lift up your Eyes, and view the exact Order and magnificent Regularity of the heavenly Bodies, without being convinced that there is a wiſe † Author of Nature, who firſt created, and ſtill preſerves, this Syſtem of Things. They are called God's Hoſt in this and many other Scriptures; becauſe he ‡ preſides over, and places them, in their proper Rank and Order; and they exactly keep thoſe Stations he hath appointed

† Cum videmus ſpeciem primùm, candoremque cæli, viciſſitudines dierum atque noctium, ſtellas eoſdem curſus conſtantiſſime ſervantes, nocturnamque cæli formam undique ſideribus ornatam—poſſumuſne dubitare quin his PRÆSIT aliquis EFFECTOR vel MODERATOR tanti operis et muneris. TUSC. Diſp. l. 1.

‡ Manent cuncta—non quia æterna ſunt, ſed quia defenduntur CURA REGENTIS.
Hæc conſervat ARTIFEX. SENEC. Ep. 58.

pointed for them, and fulfil the Commands he gives them. For

Secondly, That infinite Being who created all Things, who laid the Foundation of the Earth, who ſpanned the Heavens, did not then reſign his Influence, his Authority over them, nor diſclame the Conduct and Direction of his Works. On the contrary, he ſtill perpetually regulates and controuls them, ſaith to any Part of Creation, "Go"—and it goeth: "Do this"—and it doth it: And, in the noble Language of the Text, calls unto them, *and they ſtand up together.* Like dutiful and obedient Servants, they wait the Call, the Command of their ſupreme Maſter: There is no diſputing or evading his Authority, no Heſitation or Ambiguity pretended, they inſtantly obey his Summons, prepare to execute his Orders.

This is ſo reaſonable, that were we not aſſured of the Truth of it from undeniable Authorities in the Word of God, our own Judgments would convince us of it. We ſhould unavoidably conclude that as a Being of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs at firſt created the Univerſe, ſo he certainly reſerves the Sovereignty and Dominion over it in his own Hands. No Power inferior

to that which firſt produced it out of nothing could be thought equal to the Government of it, could prevent its deviating into general Diſorder.

But reaſonable as this Perſuaſion is, it hath often been rejected, and treated with Contempt by the Vain and by the Vicious. The Laws of Nature, and the Agency of ſecond Cauſes, are pompouſly deſcribed by them, as ſufficient to explain any Event in the phyſical Syſtem. The Deity is preſently excluded from all Interpoſition in ſuch Matters, and his Providence is diſmiſſed from all Superintendence over the Creation.

Thus, by the Vanity of their Minds, their fooliſh Heart is darkened—By the preſumption of Philoſophy that leaves * Piety and Modeſty out of its Retinue, they are betrayed into Abſurdity and Profaneneſs. Their ſurpriſing Penetration diſcovers that all Things continue as they were from the Begining of the Creation, and therefore they mock and deride the Promiſe of his Coming, and laugh at all Acknowledgements of his Power. The Laws they have given to the ſeveral Parts of Nature, they think

* Vid. *Boling.* throughout.

think ſufficient for the Oeconomy of it, without the leaſt Attention of any intellectual Being: And then, with equal Decency and Reaſon, conclude, "Let us eat and "drink—for To-morrow we die:"—Let us gratify every Appetite and Paſſion, range at large in all the Paths of luxurious ſenſual Indulgence, and then, with our Fellow-brutes, ſink into Nothing. But this laſt Notion will prove a moſt unhappy Miſtake; They will not, muſt not, ſink into Nothing: They muſt appear before that God whoſe Power they have diſowned: When he calls unto them they muſt *ſtand up together*: They will then tremble at the Recollection of their impious wretched Philoſophy.

The Laws of Nature, ſecond Cauſes, and all other material Powers are intirely paſſive, are merely Inſtruments in the Hands of God, governed by original Impreſſions, and by occaſional Influences of his Will. "As "God," ſays the excellent Mr. *Boyle*, "is "a moſt abſolute and free, ſo is he an om-"niſcient Being: And as by his ſupreme "Dominion over the Works of his Hands, "he hath a Right to diſpoſe of them as he "thinks beſt for his own Glory; ſo upon "the Score of his unfathomable Wiſdom "he may have Deſigns in the Anomalies

"that

" that happen in the World, which we are
" too ſhort-ſighted to diſcern; and may ex-
" erciſe as much Wiſdom, nay, and as much
" Providence in ſometimes receding from
" what Men call Laws of Nature, as he
" did at firſt in † in eſtabliſhing them."

The Pillars of the Earth are the Lord's, and he hath ſet the World upon them: The Elements of Nature are his Miniſters—Fire and Hail, Snow and Vapour, Wind and Storm, fulfil his Word. They regularly obſerve the Bounds he hath appointed for them, diſcharge the Offices he gave them, and obſerve the general Laws of their Conſtitution: —And for particular Purpoſes of his Wiſdom and Government, whenever he calls unto them, *they ſtand up together.*

But why this Declaration to the People of *Iſrael?* They were not Infidels in this reſpect, they believed and acknowledged God to be the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and that he fulfilled his Will in both. It is very true that they believed all this; and it is alſo true that they lived as if they had not the leaſt Knowledge of God, nor any Notion of his Power. The former Parts of the Chapter are full of their Impieties;—they were rebellious and profligate—they

† See Mr. *Boyle*'s Notion of Nture, a . 160.

were perverſe and obſtinate—their Neck was an Iron Sinew—and they were idolatrous—they gave his Glory to another. It was neceſſary therefore by frequent Deſcriptions of almighty Power, to alarm them into ſerious Reflection, and to warn them of the Danger of their wicked Provocations.

The very ſame Thing is neceſſary now. Chriſtians are convinced that the Lord is a God of Power—that his Right-hand hath the Pre-eminence, and bringeth mighty Things to paſs—that he created, and has an abſolute Dominion over, the whole World. But then this Conviction is not efficacious within them, doth not influence their Lives and Actions—they are ſecure and negligent of it, and ſo provoke God to exert it to their Deſtruction. In the Days of Inſpiration and Prophecy the divine Power was enforced by immediate Commiſſion from God; in later Days it has been frequently ſhewn by very extraordinary and amazing ‡ Manifeſtations of it in the Frame of

‡ We muſt conſider that as God is an independent, free, and wiſe, ſo is he alſo a juſt Agent: and therefore may very well be ſuppoſed to cauſe many Irregularities and Exorbitances in the World, to puniſh thoſe that Men have been guilty of. He is not over-ruled by the headſtrong Motions of Matter; but ſometimes purpoſely over-rules the regular Ones to execute his Juſtice; and therefore Plagues, Earthquakes, Inundations, and the like

of Nature. God's Deſign is the ſame in all theſe Diſpenſations—He thereby preaches Repentance to us—expects us to obſerve therefrom, that, if we will not turn, he will whet his Sword; and to conclude upon all ſuch Warnings that he hath bent his Bow, and made it ready. As the Apoſtle therefore ſaith on another Occaſion, *Would ye not be afraid of the Power*, would ye wiſh not to be terrified inſupportably, tho' the Earth be moved, and tho' the Hills be carried into the Midſt of the Sea? Do that which is good, and ye ſhall have Praiſe of the ſame; perſevere in virtuous Chriſtian Lives, and ye ſhall have ‡ Support, Comfort, and Protection from the Power of God. This you cannot ſuppoſe to depend upon any tranſient Start of Piety, any ſudden occaſional Glow of Devotion, any momentary Act of Duty, ſuch as the Obſervation of a Faſt, be it with ever ſuch Strictneſs or Solemnity, or on any incidental Humiliation. It is a much weightier Matter: It includes a ſettled habitual Love and Honor

like deſtructive Calamities, though they are ſometimes Irregularities in Nature; yet, for that very Reaſon, they are deſigned by Providence, which intends by them to deprive wicked Men of that Life, or of thoſe Bleſſings of Life, whereof their Sins have rendered them unworthy. *Mr.* Boyle's *Notion of Nature*, P. 162.

‡ Si fractus illabatur orbis
Impavidum ferient ruinæ.

Honor of Almighty God, and a ſincere uniform Deportment in the Ways of his Commands. When the Hand of God is lifted up, let all the Earth be ſilent before him: They *will* be ſilent before him, their Fears will humble and confound them, their Hearts will fail them, their Faces will gather Blackneſs. But, when the * Judgments are over, when there are no more Tokens of the Wrath and Indignation of God, then is the true Time for ſhewing your Submiſſion and Regard to him, and for proving that his monitory Diſpenſations are not loſt upon you.

God often diſplayed his Power over the Works of Nature, in a moſt ſtupendous Manner, to convince and warn the People of *Iſrael*. *Marvelous Things did he in the Land*

* A preſumptuous Forwardneſs in pronouncing on extraordinary Events we leave to raving deſigning Monks, Methodiſts, and ignorant Enthuſiaſts. The true Account of divine Prodigies take in the Senſe of Biſhop *Sprat*: "All the Creatures are ſubject to God's "Word by which they were made; he can alter their "Courſes, exalt or deſtroy their Natures, and move "them to different Ends from their own, according to "his Pleaſure—this he has often done heretofore—ſtill "his Arm is not ſhortened, nor the ſame Omnipotence "diminiſhed—ſtill he may change the wonted Laws of "the Creation, and diſpoſe of the Beings and Motions "of all Things without Controul: And when this is "done it is with a peculiar Deſign of PUNISHING, "REWARDING, or FOREWARNING Mankind."
Hiſt. of the Roy. Soc. P. 357.

Land of Egypt, *in the Field of* Zoan: *He divided the Sea, and the Waters ſtood as an Heap: He clave the Rock: He led them in the Day Time with a Cloud, and all the Night with a Light of Fire.* What were the Effects of theſe aſtoniſhing Wonders? Why they ſinned yet more and more, they forgot his Works, they tempted, and they inſulted him. What was the Reaſon of ſuch amazing Behaviour? Why they were a ſtubborn and rebellious Generation. They ſet not their Hearts aright, and their Spirit was not ſtedfaſt with God. And what was the Conſequence of ſuch Proceding? Mark it; God is uniform in the Exerciſe of his Attributes, the very ſame Conſequence muſt always follow in Caſes of the ſame Nature: *God heard their Ingratitude, and was wroth; ſo a Fire was kindled in* Jacob, *and Anger came up againſt* Iſrael, *Pſ.* lxxviii.

Keep therefore your Hearts with all Diligence—Let your Spirits cleave ſtedfaſt unto God—Own and adore him in all the Works of his Hands, and in every Operation of his Providence. Let his Mercies and his Judgments lead you to an unfeigned Repentance, to a thorough forſaking of your Sins. Then will ye, in all Events, be ſafe under his Wings: Then ſhall we (both as individuals, and

and as a People) be preſerved by his Protection; the treacherous Enemies of this Church and Nation ſhall not be able to do it Violence, the Gates of Hell ſhall not prevail againſt it. Theſe are the ſure Mercies, the infallible Promiſes of the Goſpel:—If we live with a hearty Dependence upon them, in a religious Obſervance of the Conditions they are made with, and with a devout Confidence in the Mercy of God—We have then no Reaſon to be diſcomfited, tho' the Powers of Heaven ſhould be ſhaken—tho' the Earth ſhould reel to and fro like a Drunkard—tho' the Waves of the Sea are mighty, and rage horribly: Becauſe, he that dwelleth on high is mightier—Becauſe he at whoſe Call *they ſtand up together*, can ſay to all the Powers of Nature, hitherto ſhall ye go, and no further: And becauſe we are certain that whoſo putteth his Truſt in God, Mercy embraceth him on every Side. And therefore,

To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghoſt, be aſcribed all Glory, Honor, Power, Might, Majeſty, and Dominion, now and for evermore. Amen.

FINIS.